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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
MFA FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

by

FRANCIS GORDON HARPER

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS


IN

PAINTING

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty  
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Final Visual Presentation

submitted by FRANCIS GORDON HARPER in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art.



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I hereby release the following works for incorporation into the University Collections,  
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TITLE	DATE	MEDIUM	SIZE
Nantucket House #28.	1996.	Oil & Wax on Canvas.	64" x 6





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"For fantasy to have depth it must have detail."

--Susan Sontag

*The story of Dr. Margaret Kilcoyne and the image of her house came to me through one of my grandmother's "true crime" paperbacks, with its lurid text and quickly pasted-together photo inserts.*

## **We all want to know . . .**

Working as a medical researcher, Dr. Kilcoyne made a substantial but apparently unexceptional discovery in late 1982. Convinced she was on the verge of receiving the Nobel Prize, she began to let family and colleagues know that her achievement would soon put her in "a position of nationwide power." Soon after this, however, she became convinced that she was being followed, either by colleagues or a foreign government intent on subverting the accomplishment.

Believing it was no longer safe to remain in New York, she retreated suddenly to her summer home on Nantucket Island. An Avon executive she met on this trip was hired on the spot as a "lab assistant" and told that a secret lab was being created on the island away from her enemies. But a day later, Margaret Kilcoyne had disappeared, leaving \$650 in newly purchased groceries in the house and no explanation for her whereabouts. All that was ever found was a small, neat pile of clothes on the beach and her passport. Her coat remained indoors. What had led the doctor outside on a cold January morning? Why were her clothes on the beach? Her passport? Were her enemies real, or was she delusional? **No body was ever found.**

It soon became apparent from interviews with her friends and colleagues that it was unlikely the doctor had committed suicide. What does seem probable is that Dr. Kilcoyne was suffering from mania, and had become seriously delusional. This extended first to her work, then her flight to Nantucket, and finally to a belief that she could walk on water, or safely swim in the Atlantic Ocean in January.

-Original Source:

Linda Wolfe, *The Professor and the Prostitute*  
New York, Ballantine Books, 1986.





"In this game you move fast or you die."

"So it's not like chess?"

"More like a game of checkers between idiots."

--Charles Bukowski, *Hollywood*

Nantucket owed its presence in the 19th century to the whaling industry. Men went to sea in large wooden sailing ships, and upon sighting a whale deployed much smaller twelve-man rowboats to approach and harpoon their prey.

When a whale was speared, a wild and uncontrollable ride would follow, the whale pulling the men in their flimsy vessel for miles through the rough Atlantic seas. Nothing could be done: the men hung on and waited, sometimes as long as two days, for the whale to tire completely before pulling it closer to be slaughtered. With hard-edged understatement, the men dubbed this a "Nantucket Sleighride."





**Slide List: Nantucket Sleighride: An unsolved mystery**  
**Gordon Harper**  
**January 28th to February 9th, 1997**  
**Fine Arts Building Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta**

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|----|---|----|---|
| 1  | <b>Nantucket House #1</b><br>Oil on paper , 20.5 by 30.5 inches           | 22 | <b>Nantucket House #32</b><br>Oil and glass on masonite , 19 by 15 inches |
| 2  | <b>Nantucket House #2</b><br>Oil on paper , 21.75 by 29 inches            | 23 | <b>Nantucket House #33</b><br>Oil and wax on masonite , 20 by 17.5 inches |
| 3  | <b>Nantucket House #3</b><br>Oil on paper , 34 by 45 inches               | 24 | <b>Nantucket House #34</b><br>Oil on masonite , 19 by 15 inches           |
| 4  | <b>Nantucket House #5</b><br>Oil on canvas , 63 by 61 inches              | 25 | <b>Nantucket House #35</b><br>Oil on masonite , 18 by 15.5 inches         |
| 5  | <b>Nantucket House #7</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 57 by 57 inches      | 26 | <b>Nantucket House #36</b><br>Oil on canvas , 60 by 59 inches             |
| 6  | <b>Nantucket House #9</b><br>Oil and canvas , 47.5 by 60 inches           | 27 | <b>Nantucket House #37</b><br>Oil on canvas , 72 by 66 inches             |
| 7  | <b>Nantucket House #10</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 64 by 64 inches     | 28 | <b>Nantucket House #38</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 28 by 24 inches     |
| 8  | <b>Nantucket House #11</b><br>Oil on canvas , 60 by 72 inches             |    |   |
| 9  | <b>Nantucket House #13</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 72 by 60 inches     |    |   |
| 10 | <b>Nantucket House #14</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 63 by 63 inches     |    |   |
| 11 | <b>Nantucket House #15</b><br>Oil on paper , 21.5 by 27.5 inches          |    |   |
| 12 | <b>Nantucket House #16</b><br>Oil on canvas , 59 by 36 inches             |    |   |
| 13 | <b>Nantucket House #17</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 64 by 64 inches     |    |   |
| 14 | <b>Nantucket House #18</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 21 by 18 inches     |    |   |
| 15 | <b>Nantucket House #19</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 38.5 by 36.5 inches |    |   |
| 16 | <b>Nantucket House #24</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 60 by 48 inches     |    |   |
| 17 | <b>Nantucket House #25</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 60 by 48 inches     |    |   |
| 18 | <b>Nantucket House #28</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 64 by 64 inches     |    |   |
| 19 | <b>Nantucket House #29</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 35.5 by 32.5 inches |    |   |
| 20 | <b>Nantucket House #30</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 31 by 24 inches     |    |   |
| 21 | <b>Nantucket House #31</b><br>Oil and wax on canvas , 17.5 by 15 inches   |    |   |



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